June 1976 is *extra* special to the Army aviation community. The U.S. Army—on 14 June—completes 200 years of service to the nation; Army aviation observes its 34th birthday on 6 June; and in just a few weeks—on the 4th of July—the United States of America celebrates its Bicentennial. The *DIGEST* begins commemorating all three of these significant anniversaries this month with the first of three new chapters to The Army Aviation Story. The first nine chapters were carried between June 1962 and February 1963. Chapters X, XI and XII will cover the Vietnam years

The Army Aviation Story Part X: The Early 1960s

Major David H. Price

THE U.S. ARMY's airmobile concept began, not out of any predisposition toward counter-guerrilla war, but out of the requirement to provide enhanced tactical mobility to the foot soldier. The threat considered most likely and most dangerous in the early 1960s was the conventional battlefield, with either or both sides possessing nuclear weapons. Yet, it was in a counter-guerrilla war in the Republic of Vietnam that helicopter airmobility proved itself.

Trouble was brewing in Vietnam in 1961. At the direction of President John F. Kennedy, General Maxwell D. Taylor made a visit to that beleaguered nation to assess the situation. One critical problem was the lack of mobility of the South Vietnamese forces. On General Taylor's recommendation, Army helicopters were dispatched to Vietnam in late 1961.

In December 1961 the first Army aviation units arrived in Vietnam. They were the 57th and 8th

Transportation Companies (Light Helicopter). Each consisted of 20 CH-21 helicopters.[1] The old "Flying Banana" was hardly suited for the rigors of combat in the mountains, jungles and rice paddies of Vietnam, but, as had become their habit, Army aviators made the most of what they had.

One of the first major tasks was to train the Vietnamese soldiers to get in and out of helicopters quickly and safely. Then, the Vietnamese Army (ARVN) officers had to be educated on the capabilities of the helicopter so that airmobility could be integrated into their schemes of maneuver. This period of training, advice and assistance was arduous indeed, but by late 1964 the ARVN and its U.S. advisors were conducting battalion-size airmobile operations against the Vietcong.

Organic Army aviation was not featured in Vietnam prior to mid-1965. Instead, the helicopter companies were based around the countryside in key locations, and normally operated in a geographic area delineated by province boundaries. The helicopters were under the control of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), and were parceled out to the ARVN units that requested their services.

More often than not, the early years found American helicopter commanders left out of the planning for air assaults. Command and control was a real problem until the helicopter units could establish effective liaison with the ARVN commanders and their American advisors. As time went on, cooperation grew between the lifters and the lifted, and solid relationships were molded between allies—relationships that would last until the American effort was ended.

The "Flying Banana" was replaced by the powerful, agile, turbine-powered UH-1 Huey in 1964. By September of that year 250 Hueys were operating in Vietnam. The workhorse of the Vietnam war had

Continued on page 26

Continued from page 5

arrived. With its speed, survivability, carrying capacity and ease of maintenance, the Huey was particularly suited to the task and to the environment.

Two other Army aircraft, fixed wing, made widespread reputations in the early years. The OV-1 Mohawk was dispatched to Vietnam in 1962. The Mohawk's mission was reconnaissance and surveillance. Visual and photographic reconnaissance by these twin-turbine airplanes produced a wealth of intelligence for supported units. Ground advisors had great praise for the Mohawk's performance. Mohawk aircraft were used throughout the Vietnam War, and improved models are in the Army inventory today.

The CV-2 Caribou twin-engine transport airplane preceded the helicopter into the war. The first Caribou

The CH-21 "Flying Bananas" were the first Army cargo helicopters to arrive in Vietnam

landed in Saigon in August 1961. Two years later there were two Caribou companies incountry (a total of 32 airplanes). During the early years, Army pilots flew highly dangerous missions into short, unimproved airstrips in support of far-flung Green Beret outposts. By 1964 the Caribou had been thoroughly integrated into the daily operational planning of the ARVN.

The Caribou was successful for several reasons: It was tough and afforded a high availability rate. Also, the Caribou filled the gap between the Army's larger helicopters and the U.S. Air Force C-123 Provider, which weighed almost twice as much as the Caribou. Further, the system which allocated Caribou support was flexible and responsive to allow maximum productive use of the aircraft. (In April 1966 the Caribou was transferred to the U.S. Air Force. The

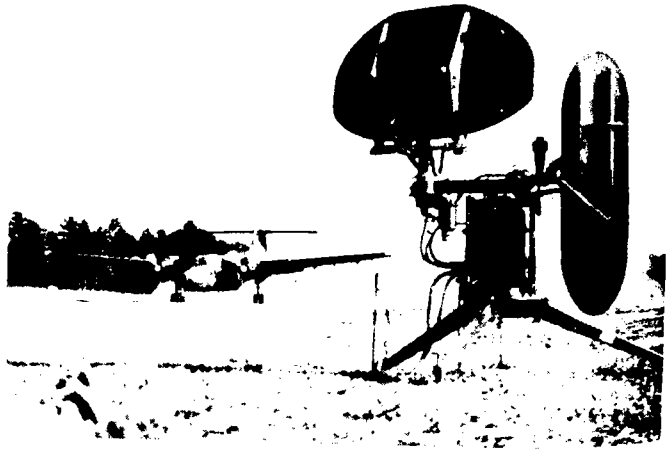
The "Flying Banana" was replaced by the powerful, agile turbine-powered UH-1

Army was assured, as part of this transaction, that the Air Force would relinquish all claims for helicopters and followon rotary wing aircraft which are designed and operated for intratheater movement, fire support, supply and resupply of Army forces.)

By the end of 1964 the Army had more than 400 aircraft and 3,700 aviation personnel in Vietnam. Command relationships with the ARVN were well established. The formerly separate helicopter companies were being integrated into battalions whose internal staffs could make full use of the critically inadequate flight hours available to support the war effort.

Meanwhile, defense strategists in the United States were thinking in terms of the nuclear battlefield. Mobility is of essence when units and people are spread thin, as one might expect on such a battlefield. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara viewed Army plans for growth in the airmobile concept as

The CV-2 Caribou was one of the aircraft used by the 11th Air Assault Division



conservative. McNamara was a genuine advocate of enhancing tactical mobility for ground forces, and he saw the helicopter as a possible solution. Army aviation enthusiasts were delighted.

In order to decide how best to use the airmobile concept in varying intensities of conflict, The Tactical Mobility Requirements Board, composed of Army officers, was appointed and subsequently directed to conduct a series of tests. The board, convened in 1962 and headed by General Hamilton H. Howze, soon became better known as The Howze Board.[2] It was given authority to do whatever was necessary to obtain meaningful results. The tests were exhaustive and elaborate. Results indicated that Army aircraft would enhance combat effectiveness in both conventional and counter-guerrilla actions, and that Army combat tasks could be accomplished faster and by a smaller commitment in manpower.

One of The Howze Board proposals was the formation of an air assault division which could move one-third of its infantry at one time. The result was the 11th Air Assault Division (Test), organized on 15 February 1963 under the command of Major General Harry W. O. Kinnard. More than 400 aircraft and thousands of aviation personnel were assembled at Fort Benning, GA.[3] The mission was to test the airmobile concept, amounting to an expansion and extension of the findings of The Howze Board.

General Hamilton H. Howze

The tests were exciting, elaborate and exhaustive; on one occasion more than 35,000 personnel participated. After the final test, Air Assault II, General Kinnard forwarded his report on the airmobile division's capabilities and potential. It read in part: "*...Beyond what I believe to be its capabilities to perform roles normal to other divisions, I am even more impressed by what I feel as its ability to perform in unique ways beyond the abilities of other divisions. For example, in a low scale war, I believe it can exert control over a much wider area and with much more speed and flexibility and with much less concern for the problems of interdicted ground communications or of difficult terrain. In higher scales of war, I see in this division an unparalleled reserve or screening force capable of operating over very large frontages. By properly picking times, places, and methods, I believe it can also operate with devastating effect against the rear of the enemy. Faced with threat or use of nuclear weapons, I believe it can widely disperse and yet, when required, quickly mass (even over irradiated ground, blown down forests or rubbled cities), strike an enemy, then disperse again.*"

Major David H. Price is a rated aviator. He has been a fire team leader, a gunnery instructor, aeroscout platoon leader and commander of an aviation company. He is an instructor of military history at the Air Force Academy

Lieutenant General C.W.G. Rich, the overall test director, recommended the retention of an air assault division in the regular Army force structure. In supporting this recommendation, General Rich said: "*The significant question is not whether we can afford such organizations, but whether this nation, with its rapidly expanding population and ever-increasing GNP [gross national product] can afford* ***NOT*** *to have them. The tested organizations are prototypes, in being, of the most versatile forces that we can add to the United States Army. The* ***movement*** *capability of all divisions, including the 11th Air Assault Division has been enhanced by Air Force aircraft; however, the integration of Army aircraft into these tested units has provided the crucial* ***maneuver*** *capability of light mobile forces to close with and destroy the enemy. In combination with infantry divisions and other standard Army organizations, airmobile units offer a balance of mobility and an increased Army combat readiness on a theater scale that is applicable to the entire spectrum of warfare.*"

The Howze Board, which spawned the 11th Air Assault Division (T), truly ranks as a major benchmark in the history of Army aviation. It paved the way for the expansion of a new type of Army — A Flying Army.

Next month: Part XI, The Mid-1960s

For additional information see previous issues of the ***DIGEST:***

[1] "A Page In History," May 1963, page 16 and "Army Aviation Milestones," June 1966, Outside Back Cover.

[2] "Industry and Air Assault," February 1964, page 3 and "Army Aviation Hall of Fame (General Howze)," May 1975, page 5.

[3] "Divarty Fullback," July 1965, page 1; "Hawk Star," September 1964, page 27 and "The Aviation Group," December 1965, page 2.